[57] Chapter 4

The Court of the Mogho Naba. Tribute and Payments Due. Obligations of Mossi Subjects to their Naba.

Morning Honors Paid to the Emperor of the Mossi

The council of the emperor of the Mossi is held every morning in front of an antechamber called zango which opens out upon a very large courtyard.

The Mossi have for a long time regarded the sun as a "god." Wend'pous yan, "God shows himself," refers to the rising of the sun, but it is used in a figurative sense to refer to the emergence of the Mogho Naba. This illustrates the regard held by the Mossi people for their chief since he is compared to the star of daylight and thus to a "god."

The Mogho Naba appears each morning dressed in an ample red robe and with a red gourmousgá (a kind of burnoose) folded and thrown over his shoulders. On his head he wears a cap, a fez, topped with a wazourfou sebré (literally, "silver paper" [streamers], that is to say, silver amulet). Red represents the light that comes with the appearance of the sun, while the silver on the cap represents the brilliance of the star itself.

Before the time set for the start of the ceremony, the three sogon'kassemsé (great servitors) bring into the courtyard the [58] cushion, nagpouré, and all the other insignia of office. As soon as the Mogho Naba appears, they arise and make a snapping sound with thumb and index finger to indicate that the naba is coming.

"Wend'pous yan" is also cried out by the gagando and luinsé (drummers) as soon as His Majesty sits down. The Bend'Naba [chief drummer] is the only one who does not beat his drum; instead, he rubs his finger back and forth over the waxed part of the drum head to imitate the roar of the lion. Four or five young men bearing loaded rifles take their places in front of the emperor.

Honors are rendered to the Mogho Naba in the following order.

1. The Samandé Naba, Baloum Naba, Wedranga Naba, and Simandé Nabila, as well as the Zusoabin'kassanga (chief eunuch and guardian of the emperor's household), are the first to greet His Majesty and to inquire about his health.

644 The arms of the sorone are ornamented with two, three, or four copper
[301] bracelets, often of alternate yellow and red metal. Sometimes they wear them at the wrists and above the elbow, and occasionally both ankles are adorned with thick bracelets or even with copper gaiters which make walking quite difficult but which are prized very highly.
[201] All these pages wait on the monarch hand and foot. If he coughs, they all rub the palms of their hands together and snap their fingers. This is repeated /18/ even when he drinks, sneezes, or spits. If he rises, the whole court rises, and when he feels those needs common to all mortals, the whole court follows and squats as he does.

644 On important feast days, the naba is followed by music, and every
533 time he makes a gesture, says a word, or takes a step, the musicians
534 play on various kinds of drums. The typical drum peculiar to Mossi country, bindré, which only the members of the drummers' guild are allowed to play, is made of a gourd which may reach 70 or 80 centimeters in diameter. The calabash is emptied, and the side where the stem was attached is removed and replaced with a tightly stretched
533 goat skin. By hitting this skin with his hands, the artist draws many different sounds from his instrument. It is quite an art to play this drum well, and the members of the guild are trained to it from childhood. They are the troubadours, the griot of the country; they sing the praises of chiefs whose genealogies they know by heart, they frequent the markets, they follow the rich and proclaim them to be the bravest, the most generous, the most handsome men this world has ever known, for the sake of a few gifts. They attend all festivities.

534 Another instrument is the lounga, made of a hollowed piece of wood shaped like an hourglass; the two ends are rather broad and joined by a narrow cylinder. This drum is carried under the arm, and its two openings are closed with goat skins joined by cords. The artist stretches these cords more or less tightly by clasping the drum between his arm and the left side of his body, while he hits one of the skins with a small curved stick ending in a little ball and held in his right hand.

The naba's orchestra also includes flutes, from which the natives, especially the Peul, draw pretty but monotonous sounds, and small one-string violins which give forth pleasing tones under a skillful bow.

644 If the Moro Naba is to ride on horseback, the grooms bring his
492 mount magnificently decked out in a copper headstall and a large embroidered rug which covers its back and rump completely. A piece of embroidered cloth hides the horse's chest, and the Arab-type saddle,